

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-15

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-15 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01

OMB-01 TRSE-00 DRC-01 /151 W
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R 271800Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8775

INFO AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMCONSUL ANTWERP

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, BE

SUBJECT: LANGUAGE DECREE RILES POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC WATERS

1. THE FLEMISH CULTURAL COUNCIL RECENTLY PUSHED THROUGH ROYAL DECREE WHICH REQUIRES USE OF DUTCH IN ALL EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONS IN FLEMISH REGION OF BELGIUM. THE DECREE, WHICH BECAME EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 16 HAS RAISED A POLITICAL STORM IN BELGIUM AND CONSIDERABLE CONCERN AMONG AMERICAN AND OTHER FOREIGN BUSINESSMEN ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO THEM, ESPECIALLY IF IT IS STRICTLY APPLIED.

2. REACTION FROM THE FRANCOPHONES HAS BEEN TO THREATEN
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RETALIATION AND TO QUESTION DECREE'S CONSTITUTIONALITY (ARTICLE

23 OF CONSITUTION STATES USE OF LANGUAGE IS OPTIONAL AND RULES OUT REGULATION BY LAW EXCEPT FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES AND LEGAL AFFAIRS. COURTS IN PAST, HOWEVER, HAVE UPHELD RIGHT OF REGION TO HAVE SINGLE LANGUAGE.) LABOR MINISTER GLINNE, A FRANCOPHONE WHO OPPOSES DECREE, HAS RESPONDED BY ORDERING SUSPENSION OF NEW WORK PERMITS IN FLANDERS FOR WORKERS FROM THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES UNLESS THEY SPEAK DUTCH. GLINNE'S ACTION DERIVES FROM STRICT INTERPRETATION OF DECREE AND RESPONDS OSTENSIBLY TO FLEMISH CONCERN OVER INFLUX OF HETEROGENEOUS ELEMENTS. IT APPEARS, HOWEVER, TO BE FIRST STEP IN HIS EFFORTS TO HAVE DECREE REVISED AND DEMONSTRATES ONE ELEMENT OF DISASTROUS EFFECTS RIGID IMPLEMENTATION OF DECREE COULD HAVE ON FLANDERS ECONOMY.

3. COMMENT: DECREE MOST LIKELY IS AIMED PRIMARILY AT BELGIAN FRANCOPHONES WORKING IN FLANDERS, ESPECIALLY IN REGION SURROUNDING OFFICIALLY BILINGUAL BUT PREPONDERANTLY FRANCOPHONE BRUSSELS. LEGAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF DECREE ARE COMPLEX AND CONSEQUENCES DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE IN ANY OF THESE RESPECTS. FOREIGN BUSINESSMEN NATURALLY CONCERNED ABOUT EFFECT OF DECREE ON OWN OPERATIONS; AND AMERICAN CONSULTING FIRM IS SPONSORING SPECIAL SEMINAR ON DECREE SEPTEMBER 27. AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN IN GENERAL, HOWEVER, EXPECT FLEMINGS' INTEREST IN ENCOURAGING FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN FLANDERS TO MITIGATE DECREE'S EFFECTS IN PRACTICE IF DECREE NOT ACTUALLY REVISED. IF ASKED FOR ADVICE FROM US FIRMS WE INTEND, UNTIL MANNER OF DECREE'S APPLICATION IS CLEAR, TO CONFINE OUR COMMENTS TO FACTUAL DESCRIPTION OF SITUATION. STRAUSZ-HUPE

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